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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001148

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#) [THIRTERM](#)

SUBJECT: A TALE OF THREE CONTACTS

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell. Reasons: 1.5 (B & D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: In meetings with National Secretary of the ruling PDP Ojo Maduekwe on May 13 and PDP Senator Ben Obi on May 15, they described these as the worst of times. Both expected today's defeat of the third term agenda in the National Assembly (septel) but worried that the actual end of this issue would not come until President Obasanjo made a public announcement and took actions to calm the polity. While Maduekwe was hopeful, Obi warned that after the defeat of the proposed constitutional amendments, Obasanjo could become "more dangerous" and counselled caution as Nigeria prepares for elections. In a separate meeting May 15, Vice President Atiku Abubakar, echoed the themes presented by these two, tending towards the viewpoint of Obi. Even though the amendment process appears over in the National Assembly, critics argue that other options remain on the table, including ongoing instability and the possibility of meddling in the electoral process to produce a situation allowing President Obasanjo to extend his time in office through emergency actions. END SUMMARY.

ON OBASANJO

2. (C) Ambassador met over the weekend with the National Secretary of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) Ojo

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Maduekwe, an Abacha cheerleader in 1997 and Minister of Transportation in President Olusegun Obasanjo's 1999 administration. Maduekwe commented that he, and others in Obasanjo's former inner circle, "never expected Obasanjo to behave this way." He said that had they known, they would have advised him against his third term efforts early on. In a separate May 15 meeting, PDP Senator Ben Obi, from Anambra State, disagreed, stating that the "signs were there years ago." He further commented that Obasanjo "had a history of overstaying his welcome" but that, like in 1979, the Nigerian political/military establishment would not allow him to continue. Obi described Obasanjo as stubborn, vindictive and cowardly. "If someone stands up to him, he will crumble," Obi said. Maduekwe said, though, that he believed that Obasanjo had "a moral conscience" and would ultimately "do the right thing."

ON THE THIRD TERM

3. (C) Both commented that the third term amendment could not carry the National Assembly. Ojo said that Obasanjo was depending on a shrinking circle of advisors to manage the amendments, including only PDP Board of Trustees Chairman and former Minister of Works and Housing Tony Anenih and Special Advisors Andy Uba and Florence Ita-Giwa. Others, he said, had fallen out of the circle for various reasons.

4. (C) Obi said that retired General T.Y. Danjuma had met with Obasanjo last week and told him bluntly to leave office. Vice President Atiku Abubakar and other sources confirmed the gist of the meeting where, according to Obi, Danjuma, ignoring all protocol, advised Obasanjo that his time was up.

WHAT NEXT?

5. (C) Both men cautioned that defeat in the National Assembly would not be the end of the matter, although Maduekwe was "hopeful" that the President would follow his better instincts and step aside. Obi, on the other hand, worried that once Obasanjo conceded defeat on the constitutional amendment, "he would become more dangerous." Obi stressed that three options remain. The first, he said, was the ongoing instability in the Delta. "Remember I advised that there could be no peace in the Delta until questions of Obasanjo's extension were resolved," he said. He believes that Obasanjo could manipulate the crisis to declare a state of emergency in the country and attempt to use that to justify the cancellation of elections for an indeterminate period of time.

6. (C) Alternatively, Obi said that Obasanjo has

demonstrated that the Independent National Elections Commission (INEC) could be manipulated to provide a pretext for term extension. "The President could either suspend preparations, claiming they were inadequate, or wait until a faulty process had been concluded to step in as the statesman capable of saving Nigeria from chaos. Both Maduekwe and the Vice President concurred with this assessment, with Atiku echoing Obi's statements almost verbatim.

17. (C) All three were worried about Obasanjo's state of mind. While none specifically mentioned his spiritual advisors, Maduekwe did express concern that the President's "messianic streak" could entice him to "stay at all costs." While Obi was less concerned about this issue, all were interested in exploring the possibility of a face-saving "soft landing" for Obasanjo. Atiku said that Governor Tinubu (Lagos State, Alliance for Democracy) was willing to attempt a reconciliation between the President and the Vice President, but Atiku said this could not happen until "the third term is off the table." Concerned about the President's possible reaction they said they have been exploring many options to convince Obasanjo to walk away, through military, political, traditional and even international messengers. They all commented, however, that a future role for Obasanjo was important, whether through a United Nations appointment, an African Union role, a university position (such as Boston University's Balfour African Presidents in Residence program), or some other avenue to ensure President Obasanjo's acquiescence.

COMMENT

18. (C) The President could see the writing on the wall in the aftermath of the past week's activities and might decide to withdraw himself from the political process, perhaps (according to Atiku) refusing to endorse a successor. However, if these men are correct, the more likely scenario is that Obasanjo will continue to explore exotic options to extend his stay in the Aso Rock Presidential Villa beyond 2007.
CAMPBELL